



# **Material to Aid the Preparation For the Holy Mystery of Repentance**

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## The Sacred Mystery of Repentance

Perhaps the most misunderstood sacrament, or mystery, of the Christian Church is that which we commonly call confession, but is more properly called repentance. How did it originate? What role does the priest play? Is there a special procedure for confession? The Holy Scriptures hold answers to these questions. God's Holy Word promises "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness*" (1 John 1:9). The faithful are to bring their sins to God in repentance and receive cleansing and forgiveness.

The early Christians would stand and confess their sins to God in the presence of the whole congregation. The Lord Jesus encouraged His followers to walk in the light together, to confront problems corporately, to "*tell it to the church*" (Matt. 18:17). Thus St. James writes, "*Confess your trespasses to one another*" (James 5:16). But as time went on and the Church grew in numbers, strangers came to visit and public confession became more difficult. Out of mercy, priests began to witness confessions of sin privately on behalf of the Church.

Jesus, giving His disciples the authority to forgive sin, said, "*If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained*" (John 20:23; c.f. Matt. 16:19, 18:17-19). From the beginning, Christians understood that the grace of ordination endowed the shepherd of the flock with the discernment and compassion to speak the words of remission, *on behalf of Christ*, regarding the sins of those who confess and turn from their sin. For

God has promised the removing of sin from us “as far as the east is from the west” (Ps. 103:12). St. John Chrysostom says, “The priests decree below, God confirms above, and the Master agrees with the opinion of His slaves”.

“You did not choose Me,” the Lord Jesus told the Twelve, “but I chose you and appointed [ordained] you.” (John 15:16). To these same disciples Jesus promised, “It is not you who speak but the Holy Spirit” (Mark 13:11). Whom God calls, He equips. Paul writes to Timothy, “Stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands” (2 Tim. 1:6). It is the grace of the Holy Spirit which enables the priest to serve God and the people. Priests are only the visible instrument of God’s mercy at the performance of the Mystery, which is performed invisibly through them by God Himself. It is God (the Holy Trinity) Who forgives our sins.

Thus the Church has encouraged her faithful: If you know you have committed a specific sin, do not hide it but confess it before coming to the Holy Eucharist. St. Paul wrote, “Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup” (1 Cor. 11:28), and “If we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged” (1 Cor. 11:31).

King David learned a lesson regarding his sin which is recorded for our benefit. For about a year, he had hidden his sins of adultery with Bathsheda and the murder of her husband (2 Sam. 11:1-12:13). Then, confronted by Nathan the prophet, David repented from his heart and confessed his sin in a psalm which is used for general confession to this day (Ps. 50). The joy of salvation was restored to him.

People ask, “Can’t I confess to God privately?” Certainly one can, although there is no clear biblical basis for it. Even general confession occurs in the Church. In His mercy, God provides the mystery of confession (more properly called the mystery of repentance) to give us deliverance from sin and from what psychologists call denial.

I have sinned by lack of endurance towards my illnesses and sorrows, a devotion to the comforts of life and by being too attached to my parents, children, relatives and friends.

I have sinned by hardening my heart, having a weak will and by not forcing myself to do good.

I have sinned by miserliness, a love of money, the acquisition of unnecessary things and immoderate attachment to things.

I have sinned by self-justification, a disregard for the admonitions of my conscience and failing to confess my sins through negligence or false pride.

I have sinned many times by my Confession: belittling, justifying and keeping silent about sins.

I have sinned against the Most-holy and Life-creating Mysteries of the Body and Blood of our Lord by coming to Holy Communion without humility or the fear of God.

I have sinned in deed, word and thought, knowingly and unknowingly, willingly and unwillingly, thoughtfully and thoughtlessly, and it is impossible to enumerate all of my sins because of their multitude. But I truly repent of these and all others not mentioned by me because of my forgetfulness and I ask that they be forgiven through the abundance of the Mercy of God.

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The various items included in this collection should be used by each and every person in the parish in their examinations of their consciences, and in the preparation of a list of sins and concerns that should be brought up and mentioned to your Confessor in the Holy Mystery of Repentance.

I have not preserved a love for God and for my neighbor nor have I made enough efforts, because of laziness and lack of care, to learn the Commandments of God and the precepts of the Holy Fathers.

I have sinned: by not praying in the morning and in the evening and in the course of the day; by not attending the services or by coming to Church only half-heartedly, lazily and carelessly; by conversing during the services, by not paying attention, by letting my mind wander and by departure from the Church before the dismissal and blessing.

I have sinned by judging members of the clergy.

I have sinned by not respecting the Feasts, breaking the Fasts, and by immoderation in food and drink.

I have sinned by self-importance, disobedience, willfulness, self-righteousness, and the seeking of approval and praise.

I have sinned by unbelief, lack of faith, doubts, despair, despondency, abusive thoughts, blasphemy and swearing.

I have sinned by pride, a high opinion of my self, narcissism, vanity, conceit, envy, love of praise, love of honors, and by putting on airs.

I have sinned: by judging, malicious gossip, anger, remembering of offenses done to me, hatred and returning evil for evil; by slander, reproaches, lies, slyness, deception and hypocrisy; by prejudices, arguments, stubbornness, and an unwillingness to give way to my neighbor; by gloating, spitefulness, taunting, insults and mocking; by gossip, by speaking too much and by empty speech.

I have sinned by unnecessary and excessive laughter, by reviling and dwelling upon my previous sins, by arrogant behavior, insolence and lack of respect.

I have sinned by not keeping my physical and spiritual passions in check, by my enjoyment of impure thoughts, licentiousness and unchastity in thoughts, words and deeds.

It is easy to pray in isolation, yet never come clean. It is far, far more effective to confess aloud to God before a priest, and benefit from his guidance and help.

It is essential to remember that the remission of sins in the Mystery is an act of mercy. It is given for our spiritual profit, “for edification, and not for destruction” (2 Cor. 10:8).

Thus we come before the holy icon of Christ, to whom we confess, and are guided by the priest, our spiritual father, in a cleansing inventory of our lives. When we tell God all, naming our sins and failures, we hear those glorious words of freedom which announces Christ’s promise of forgiveness of all our sins. We resolve to “go and sin no more” (John 8:11).

(Reference: *The Orthodox Study Bible*, p571. Copyright © 1993 by St. Athanasius Orthodox Academy, Nelson ISBN 0-8407-8391-4)

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### A Preparation for Confession

God does not desire the death of a sinner, but rather that he turn away from his sins unto life. In the Holy Mystery of Repentance we have the means by which we may obtain forgiveness of our sins, and be restored to the favor of God, our heavenly Father. In order that you may make a good confession it is necessary for you to prepare yourself carefully. Ask God to give you the Grace to make a *thorough* examination of your conscience, and the courage to make a sincere and complete confession, and the strength to amend your way of life in the days to come.

Begin your examination with the time of your last Confession; try to recall whether you omitted anything through carelessness or lapse of memory, or from fear of embarrassment. Examine yourself with the assistance of the form of self-examination according to the Ten Commandments of God which follows.

It is absolutely necessary that you be truly sorry for the sins you have committed, and that you firmly intend to change your manner of living.

## **Self Examination Based on the Ten Commandments**

### **First Commandment**

Have I believed in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit?

Have I failed to trust in God and His mercy?

Have I complained against God in adversity?

Have I been thankful for God's blessings?

Have I doubted the Christian faith and the teachings of the Church?

Have I tried to serve God and keep His Commandments?

Have I given way to superstition?

Have I frequented the religious meetings of heretics or schismatics?

Have I neglected my duties to God through fear of ridicule or persecution?

Have I failed to pray to God faithfully? Have I put myself before God?

### **Second Commandment**

Have I made an idol of any person or thing?

Have I given to anyone or anything the worship that is due to God alone?

Have I set before myself the Holy life of Jesus and tried to imitate Him?

Have I read the Holy Scriptures regularly?

Have I been irreverent during Church Services, or let my atten-

*Eleventh:* Aspire not to be called holy before thou really art, but first be holy, that the more truly thou may'st be called so. Live by God's commandments every day. Treasure chastity. Harbour neither hatred nor jealousy of anyone, and do nothing out of envy. Do not love quarreling; shun arrogance. Respect thine elders, and love the young. Pray for thine enemies out of love for Christ. If thou hast a dispute with anyone, make peace before the setting of the sun.

*Twelfth:* Never lose hope in the mercy of God.

These, then, are the tools of the spiritual craft. When we have used them without ceasing day and night and have returned them on Judgement day, our wages will be the reward the Lord hast promised. What thine eye hast not seen nor the ear heard, God hast prepared for them that love Him. [I Cor 2:9]

**As faithful Christians, we must toil daily making full use of these tools.**

## **A Preparation for Confession**

*by St. John of Kronstadt*

I, a sinful soul, confess to our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ, all of my evil acts which I have done, said or thought from baptism even unto this present day.

I have not kept the vows of my baptism, but have made myself unwanted before the face of God.

I have sinned before the Lord by lack of faith and by doubts concerning the Orthodox Faith and the Holy Church; by ungratefulness for all of God's great and unceasing gifts; His long-suffering and His providence for me, a sinner; by lack of love for the Lord, as well as fear, through not fulfilling the Holy Commandments of God and the canons and rules of the Church.

prove false, but speak the truth with heart and tongue.

*Fifth:* Do not repay one bad turn with another. Do not injure anyone, however, bear thine own injuries patiently. Love thine enemies. If people curse thee, curse them not in return, but rather bless them instead. Endure persecution for the sake of justice. [I Thess 5:15, I Peter 3:9, Matt 5:34, Luke 6:27, Matt 5:10]

*Sixth:* Thou must not be proud. Nor given to wine. Refrain from over-eating or sleeping and from laziness. Grumble not, neither speakest thou ill of others. [Titus 1:7, I Tim 3:3, Romans 12:11]

*Seventh:* Place thy hope in God only. If thou seest something good in thyself, give credit to God, not to thyself. But be ever certain that the evil thou dost commit is always thine own and thine to acknowledge.

*Eighth:* Live in fear of the day of judgement, and have a great horror of hell. Yearn always for life everlasting with holy desire. Day by day, remind thyself that thou shalt die. Hour by hour, keep careful watch over all that thou shalt do; be aware that God's gaze is upon thee, wherever thou might'st be. As soon as hurtful thoughts come into thy heart, dash them against Christ and disclose them to thy spiritual father. Guard thy lips from harmful or deceptive speech. Prefer moderation in speech, and speak no foolish chatter, never say anything merely to provoke laughter. Have no love of immoderate or boisterous laughter.

*Ninth:* Listen readily to holy readings, and devote thyself often to prayer. Every day with tears and sighs confess thy past sins to God in prayer, and change from these evil ways in the future.

*Tenth:* Do not gratify the promptings of the flesh; hate the urgings of self-will. Obey the orders of thine elder unreservedly, even if his own conduct – which God forbid – be at odds with what he says. Remember the teaching of the Lord: Do what they say, not what they do. [Matt 22:3]

tion wander, or been insincere in my attendance?

Have I failed to receive Holy Communion regularly and without due preparation?

### **Third Commandment**

Have I profaned the Holy name of God in any way?

Have I cursed anyone or anything, or sworn a false oath?

Have I failed to give proper reverence to holy persons and things?

Have I shown due respect for the clergy of the Church?

Have you hindered the clergy in performing God's work?

Have I broken any solemn vow or promise?

Have I entered into any unlawful contract or made an unlawful promise?

### **Fourth Commandment**

Have I stayed away from Church on Sundays?

Have I prevented others from going to Church?

Have I performed unnecessary work on Sundays?

Have I spent the day in unwholesome fashion or profaned it by improper conduct?

Have I prayed at home if I could not go to Church because of illness or some other grave or serious reason?

Have I caused someone else to profane the Lord's Day?

Have I kept the Fasts and the Feasts as prescribed by the Church?

### **Fifth Commandment**

Have I respected my parents and been obedient to them?

Have I deceived them, or caused them pain by my words or actions?

Have I neglected them or failed to help them?

Have I done my duty towards my family?

Have I been wanting in love or kindness towards my spouse, or harmed him (or her) in any way ?

Have I set my children a good example and tried to bring them up properly?

Have I corrected their faults with patience and not with anger?

Have I over-indulged or spoiled them?

Have I neglected my God-children & failed in my obligations towards them.

Have I worked for my employers honestly and diligently?

Have I treated fairly all those who have worked for me?

Have I honored God as my Heavenly Father by treating others as my brothers?

Have I honored the Church as my spiritual Mother by honoring and practicing my religion in accordance with her teachings?

### **Sixth Commandment**

Have I caused the injury or death of any one, or wished that I were dead?

Have I done anything to shorten my own life or that of someone else by injuring health, or through evil and intemperate living?

Have I given way to anger, or harmed others with words or actions?

Have I defamed others who needed help, or failed to stand up for those unjustly treated?

Have I been cruel to anyone?

Have I mistreated animals or destroyed any life unnecessarily?

Have I failed to forgive anyone or harbored evil thoughts against them?

Unbelief, Unbridled Desire, Uncleanliness, Uselessness, Using foul language, Usury, Unteachability, Utter destruction,

Venery, Verbosity, Vice, Vilification,

Wantonness, Warfare, Weakness of intellect, Wiliness, Wrongdoing,

## **The Tools for Good Works From the Rule of Saint Benedict of Nursia**

*First:* Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. [Matthew 22:37-39, Mark 12: 30-31, Luke 10:27]

*Second:* Thou shalt do no murder, thou shalt not commit adultery; thou shalt not steal; thou shalt not bear false witness, thou shalt honor everyone; never do unto another that which thou dost not wish to have done unto thee. [Romans 13:9, I Peter 2:17, Tobit 4:16, Matthew 7:12, Luke 6:31]

*Third:* Deny or renounce thyself in order to follow Christ. Discipline thy body; pamper not thyself but rather love fasting. Thou shouldst relieve the lot of the poor, clothe the naked, visit the sick, and bury the dead. Go to visit the troubled and offer consolation to those in sorrow. [Matt 16:24, Luke 9:23, I Cor 9:27, Matt 25:36]

*Fourth:* Thy behaviour and deportment must be different from the world's way; the love of Christ must come before all else. Thou shalt not act in anger, neither shouldst thou nurse a grudge. Rid thy heart of all deceit. Never give a hollow greeting of peace, nor turn away when someone needs thy love. Bind thyself to no oath lest it

Idolatry, Ignorance of God, Illicit gains, Ill temper, Immodest dancing, Impassionedness, Impiety, Implacability, Imperfection, Improper songs, Impudence, Inattentiveness, Incest, Indecency, Indifference, Indolence, Infatuation, Ingratitude, Insatiability, Insensitivity, Insolence, Insubordination, Intolerance, Irritability,

Jealousy, Jesting, Jokes,

Killing,

Lack of compassion, Lack of discrimination, Lack of faith, Lack of fear of God, Lack of progress, Lack of understanding, Laughter, Lawlessness, Laxity, Laziness, Lethargy, License of Tongue, Lasciousness, Lightmindedness, Listlessness, Love of idols, Loquacity, Love of Popularity, Lying,

Madness, Malice, Making sport of others, Malevolence, Masturbation, Matricide, Meddlesomeness, Mental blindness, Mercilessness, Mindless coupling, Mindless enjoyment, Mindless friendship, Mindless joy, Misuse, Mockery, Moral errors,

Negligence, Niggardliness, Nonsensicality,

Oath taking, Obduracy, Obfuscation of thoughts, Obloquy, Obtuseness, Oppression, Ostentation, Overeating, Over frugality,

Partiality, Passion, Patricide, Perversity, Pettiness, Pimping, Pollution, Poverty of faith, Presumption, Pride, Pusilanimity,

Quarrelsomeness,

Railing, Rancor, Rapine, Rashness, Reprehensible collusion, Reprehensible despondency, Revelry,

Sacrilege, Satanic love, Scorn for one's neighbor, Seduction, Self-Indulgence, Self-Inflation, Self-Vaunting, Senselessness, Severity, Shamelessness, Silliness, Silly talk, Sinfulness, Slackness, Slothfulness, Sluggishness, Sodomy, Sordidness, Spiritual paralysis, Spurious knowledge, Stumbling, Strife, Stupidity, Suicide,

Theft, Transgression, Trickery,

### **Seventh Commandment**

Have I given way to impure thoughts, words, or deeds?

Have I committed any unworthy actions alone or with others?

Have I degraded myself in any way, or forgotten human dignity?

Have I read immoral books or magazines, or delighted in obscenities?

Have I associated with bad companions or frequented unsavory places?

Have I eaten or drunk or smoked too much?

Have I been lazy, idle, or wasted my time?

Have I led others to commit sinful acts?

Have I been unfaithful to any trust confided in me?

### **Eighth Commandment**

Have I stolen anything or contemplated doing so?

Have I kept anything that did not belong to me?

Have I tried honestly to find owners of lost articles I have found?

Have I cheated anyone? Have I paid my debts?

Have I lived within my income, and not wastefully or extravagantly?

Have I given to charitable causes in proportion to my means?

Have I been honest and upright?

### **Ninth Commandment**

Have I told lies, or added to or subtracted from the truth?

Have I made careless statements or spoken evil of anyone?

Have I told any secrets entrusted to me, or betrayed anyone?

Have I gossiped about anyone or harmed their reputation?

Have I concealed the truth, or assisted in carrying out a lie, or

pretended to commit a sin of which I was not guilty?

Have I tried to see the good in others rather than their shortcomings?

### Tenth Commandment

Have I envied anything good that has come to others?

Have I been jealous of the good fortune of others?

Have I wished for anything that belonged to another?

Have I damaged or destroyed the property of others?

Have I hoped for things God has not given me?

Have I been discontented with my lot?

Have I been stingy? Have I held back anything due another?

Have I hoped for the downfall of anyone so that I might gain by it?

Have I failed to be gracious and generous to anyone.

Have I expected God to give me that which I would refuse my fellow man?

### Sayings from the Holy Fathers

“When the first order of angels fell from the angelic glory and became demons, the other nine orders humbled themselves and worshipped the All-Holy Trinity, and remained in their place and rejoiced forever. We, too, my brethren, must reflect what an evil thing pride really is - that it cast down the devil from angelic glory and he will always burn in Hades - and that humility kept the angels in Heaven, and they rejoice unendingly in the glory of the Holy Trinity. Let us then, my brethren, avoid pride, because it is the first daughter of the devil – our enemy, it is a path that leads to Hades; and let us have humility, because it is angelic, and is a path that leads us to Paradise”.

## A List of the Passions

Aberrations, Abusiveness, Acceptance of bribes, Accusation, Adultery Affectation, Affluence, Aggressiveness, Asperity, Assent to evil, A Stained Soul, Astrology, Attraction to what is fleeting, Audacity, Avarice.

Bad habits, Bestiality, Bewitchment, Blasphemy, Boastfulness, Bodily comfort beyond necessity, Boorishness, Brawling, Breaking of faith, Breaking of fasts, Brigandry, Burning Lust

Calumny, Censure, Chicanery, Clapping, Clinging to life, Coarseness, Complaining, Condemnation, Confusion, Consciencelessness, Conspiracy, Contemptuousness, Contentiousness, Contumely, Covenant-breaking, Cowardice, Criminality, Curiosity,

Dallying, Daydreaming, Dearth of good actions, Defilement, Dejection, Disdain of God, Divinization, Denial of God, Dissipation, Deceit, Delusion, Demonic provocation, Dissoluteness, Doltishness, Depravity, Derangement, Derision, Despair, Disdain of one's neighbor, Dishonour, Disobedience, Disorderliness, Drowsiness of soul, Drunkenness, Dullness,

Eating unclean food, Effeminacy, Enervation, Enmity, Enticement, Envy, Evil intention, Exasperation, Excessive love of order, Exploitation,

Falling away from God in all things, Fantasy, Fault-finding, Feigned affection, Fellowship in heresy, Ferocity, Fickleness, Fighting, Flattery, Flogging, Folly, Forgetfulness, Forswearing oneself, Foulness, Frenzy, Frivolity,

Garrulity, Gaucherie, Gall, Greed, Giving offense, Gluttony, Grave robbing,

Hardness of heart, Harshness, Hatred, Hatred of God, Hatred of one's brothers, Haughtiness, Heartlessness, Heavy Drinking, Heresy, Hogishness, Hopelessness,